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The Contexts and American Epitext of Evgenii Evtushenko's *A Precocious Autobiography*

The Soviet Russian poet Evgenii Evtushenko, just thirty years of age, first published *A Precocious Autobiography* (1963) in translation in western European periodicals. This was his attempt to speak directly to international audiences, bolstering his global reputation while responding to critics. I offer new facts about the circumstances of this autobiography's publication and Evtushenko's subsequent defence of his actions in the face of Soviet criticism. American appropriations of this autobiography are of special interest. The text, but especially the polemical back-and-forth between Evtushenko and his critics, which nourished the autobiography's epitext, riveted American political elites (including Allen Dulles and Sargent Shriver) in the summer and autumn of 1963. This narrative of literary reception refines our understanding of Soviet tamizdat and its early history; it also reveals Evtushenko's prominence as a global literary figure in US public debates in the early 1960s.

Introduction

'A poet's autobiography is his poetry. Anything else can only be a footnote. A poet is a poet only when the reader sees him whole, with all his feelings, all his thoughts, and all his actions, as if the reader held him in the hollow of his hand' (Yevtushenko 1963: 11).

These opening sentences of Evgenii Evtushenko's *A Precocious Autobiography* (1963) represent an audacious, even paradoxical beginning to a thirty-year-old's prose autobiography. Evtushenko here posits an essential identity between a poet and his lyric oeuvre; yet he states this identity in a prose account that purports to pull back the curtain on his own path to literary stardom. The lack of personal pronouns suggests a universal perspective. Evtushenko speaks not of one poet in particular, but poets as such. Further, the ontology of the poet finds its grounding in an external actor; namely, the reader. Continuing the reconstructed argument, the poet qua poet must give himself to his reader ('all his feelings, all his thoughts, and all his actions') in order to achieve a recognized status. Poetry and poets are formed *in and*

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through public view on this account. It comes as no surprise that this supposedly universal definition tracks closely to Evtushenko's own rhetorical posture enacted in his lyric poetry, one of radical openness, sincerity, and direct address to his public. Over the course of this, his first extended prose text, Evtushenko attempts to convince his reader of the absolute necessity for his autobiography, generating a certain tension with the poetry-centred vision articulated in this opening paragraph (excerpted above).

To speak broadly of genre, ego-documents such as published memoirs and autobiographies are inimitable tools in the writer's arsenal with which writers creatively fashion their own selves for and in public view.[1] Scholars have routinely dissected the rhetoric of 'self-disclosure' in this genre, revealing the artificiality between private and public selves as well as the symbiotic relationship between published autobiography and literary celebrity.[2] Celebrities, particularly celebrity writers, often turn to autobiography so as to combat perceived misrepresentations of their lives and work. The performance in and through the autobiography becomes a defence mechanism by which the famous author bypasses self-interested mediators and creates a 'pact' directly with the reader (Lejeune 1989). Philippe Lejeune's influential theorization of autobiography works particularly well for this Evtushenko source material: his approach foregrounds the reader in defining this generic tradition, which can be understood as a 'contract' or 'pact' of authorial authenticity offered to the reader. The Evtushenko-related plot reconstructed in this article demonstrates that the autobiography as an active defence of the

[1] With her understanding of the autobiography as an 'act' rather than a static text, Elizabeth W. Bruss shows how 'various aspects of the act finally coalesce' into 'a personality, a self, an identity; it must have, as Blake might say, a "human face", whether the author or the reader is ultimately responsible for imposing it' (Bruss 1976: 12).

[2] Moran's analysis of John Updike's *Self-Consciousness: Memoirs* (1989) models common literary-critical practices in dealing with a writer's autobiography and in particular, the constitutive role of foils (in Updike's case, the New York City literati; in Evtushenko's case, neo-Stalinist functionaries) for the authorial subject in claiming a rhetorical position (Moran 2000: 83–99). While celebrity studies as a subfield originated in Anglophone cultural studies (see especially Braudy 1986), Slavists have recently examined nineteenth- and twentieth-century Russian writers through the lens of celebrity (e.g. Denner 2009; Harrington 2016; Vaysman 2023).

authorial image's integrity can involve both text and context, with context here being particularly salient. Put differently, the autobiography *as well as* the author's rhetorical performance in the accompanying (international, multilingual) paratextual space both offer opportunities for the author to set the record straight, so to speak. The claims made by both the poet-author (Evtushenko) and his American mediators, claims found in the context and epitext, are my primary research objects.[3]

Evtushenko explicitly addresses his 'confessional' *A Precocious Autobiography* to Western readers.[4] It was first published in French, then German, and later in English (as well as multiple other languages), a fact that I will address in depth below. The complicated circumstances of the text's tamizdat publication, as well as Evtushenko's own statements in the text itself, merit close attention.[5] Evtushenko's rhetorical statements and strategies in and around his *Autobiography* show how the author himself had, in this instance, considerable agency in directing the creation of his own reputation.[6] Evtushenko's prose work came on the heels of the snowballing press attention in the US in the period 1960–1963. The publication of Evtushenko's famous anti-antisemitic poem 'Babi Yar' (published in September 1961), the poet's trips abroad (including to the US), and his appearance on the cover of *Time Magazine* in April 1962 were all important early inflection points in the popularization of Evtu-

[3] I follow Gérard Genette's formula '*paratext = peritext + epitext*', focusing especially on the epitext (Genette 1997: 5). All of the threshold framing elements for a particular book comprise the paratext. The paratext is divided into two further categories: the peritext, which may include tables of contents, introductions, prefaces, indices, the dust jacket, and all those elements physically affixed to the text, and then the epitext, which includes critical reviews, advertisements, interviews with the author, recitations, and other discourses that are not bound in the same volume as the text.

[4] Evtushenko in his later 1998 memoir asserts that, among European intellectuals, his memoir functioned as productive proselytization material for the communist cause (Evtushenko 1998: 283–84). A few anecdotes are offered in support of this claim, but the poet likely exaggerates.

[5] For a theorization and historical introduction to tamizdat, see Klots 2023: 1–33.

[6] While L.F. Mashkovtseva provides a helpful, if brief, survey of 'literary reputation' as a theme in Russian literary studies, she overstates her case when she claims that reputation 'does not much depend upon the will of the writer himself', (Mashkovtseva 2012: 174–76; quotation from 176).

shenko among American audiences. Given the author's fame on both sides of the Iron Curtain, *A Precocious Autobiography* was a global literary (and literary-political) event, though one that has hitherto escaped scholarly attention.[7]

In what follows, I reveal the important (sometimes contradictory) roles that this text played not only in Evtushenko's professional trajectory, but also in the fraught public debates in the Soviet Union and especially in the United States. Archival material uncovers new understandings of Evtushenko's conduct in maximizing the appeal of the text among Western audiences while minimizing domestic blowback. The first part of my article, which features factual historical reconstruction, will hopefully encourage other scholars to attend to the fine-grained details of the text's publication. Some space is reserved for a discussion of the text itself, though much of the historical interest resides in how the autobiography was published, reviewed, and appropriated. This reception (excavated from the epitextual record) involved surprising interventions from two figures from the American political establishment: the Peace Corps' founding director Sargent Shriver and former CIA director Allen Dulles. For a period in the summer and autumn of 1963, *A Precocious Autobiography* stood at the centre of American elite thinking on US–USSR relations, the viability of reformed Soviet socialism, and grand strategy in geopolitics as a whole.

The Publication of *A Precocious Autobiography*

The factual background regarding the appearance of Evtushenko's autobiography is convoluted but also vital to our understanding of this document's significance. On the basis of published materials, we can surmise the following: In February of 1963, Evtushenko composed a novella-length prose memoir while traveling in the Federal Republic of Germany and France; in France, Evtushenko met Picasso, Chagall, Miró, French autoworkers, and officials from the French Communist Party (Afiani et al. 2005:

[7] The *Autobiography* is briefly discussed in Ziolkowski 1987: 199-202. Ziolkowski links Evtushenko's *Autobiography* with its supposed 'forerunner,' Boris Pasternak's *Safe Conduct* [*Okhrannaia gramota*], though this parallel is underdeveloped in her article.

596).[8] These trips were sanctioned, of course, by Soviet Communist Party authorities. In addition to private meetings, he also gave public readings to thousands of spectators. At some point during his trip, the poet handed over his laconic autobiography to the Parisian weekly magazine *L'Express*, which published it in installments in French translation. *L'Express* splashed a headshot of Evtushenko across the cover of the 21 February 1963, issue (pages 16–19).[9] This autobiography was sensationally billed as a 'confession of a child of the Soviet century' ('Confession d'un enfant du siècle soviétique'). K.S. Karol (birth name: Karol Kewes), a Polish-born, Russophone *L'Express* journalist, provided a column of introductory remarks to Evtushenko, whom he called a 'brilliant personality,' emphasizing the young poet's ability to enthrall audiences and readers. The last installment of the autobiography appeared in *L'Express* on March 21 ('Evtouchenko raconte: Suis-je le chef des voyous?' 1963: 33–35).

Evtushenko's 'confession' spread like wildfire around Europe, Israel, North America, and the entire Anglosphere. It was picked up by the West German journal *Stern* and published in German as early as March 1963. Israeli periodicals reported on the autobiography with provocative article titles, in one instance expressly contrasting Evtushenko with the Soviet Premier ('Evtushenko: there is antisemitism. Khrushchev: there is no antisemitism').[10] By the summer, the publisher E.P. Dutton had already published the text in book form for the US reader; it was translated from the Russian by Andrew R. MacAndrew, a Slavist at the University of Virginia, and a prolific translator of Russian literature. The autobiography was published as a book simultaneously in England and Canada; it was also released in 1963 into the Italian and French markets (Evtušenko 1963; Ev-

[8] From 'Zapiska Glavlita SSSR o stat'iakh o E.A. Evtushenko v burzhuaznoi inostrannoi presse', authored on 25 March 1963. Archival documents analyzed by Viacheslav Ogryzko indicate that Evtushenko did the bulk of the work on the autobiography during his multi-week stay in France (Ogryzko 2014: 4).

[9] The decision was made to recall Evtushenko back to the USSR just two days later, on 23 February. See 'Zapiska ideologicheskogo otdela TsK KPSS o neobkhodimosti vozvrashcheniia iz komandirovki vo Frantsiiu i FRG poeta E.A. Evtushenko' (Afiani et al. 2005: 587).

[10] See 'Spravka o stat'iakh E. Evtushenko, opublikovannykh v izrail'skom zhurnale "Davar gashavua" i v gazete "Lamatkhil'"' (Afiani et al. 2005: 598–600).

touchenko 1963). The London-based émigré publisher (and provocateur) Alec Flegon published an unauthorized copy in Russian through his Flegon Press in 1964.[11] The book was not published in the USSR in this period, though the work circulated in samizdat in the Soviet Union throughout the 1960s, in part thanks to Evtushenko's own efforts in distributing it among friends (Afiani et al. 2005: 750–52).[12] This autobiography caused a global literary scandal that lingered for weeks and months beginning in the late winter of 1963.

What was so troublesome about the autobiography from the perspective of the Soviet regime, particularly its cultural and ideological apparatus? According to Evtushenko's Soviet critics, the poet had 1) published a (purportedly) politically incorrect text; 2) published said text abroad; 3) sought publication in outlet(s) that were 'bourgeois' and hostile to Soviet interests; and finally, 4) Party authorities had not given Evtushenko permission to do any of this. Notice here that the *context* was most offensive to these critics –– it was how and where the work was published more than what was actually said that caused outrage among Soviet ideological authorities, as well as mainstream cultural figures. Sergei Chuprinin in the reference work *Ottepel'* [*The Thaw*] inserts a revealing assortment of criticisms of Evtushenko's autobiography from various Soviet voices (Chuprinin 2020: 696–724). Even the celebrated Soviet astronaut Iurii Gagarin expressed his dismay at Evtushenko's carelessness. At the height of the campaign against the poet, Kornei Chukovskii heard rumors that Evtushenko had committed suicide (Chuprinin 2020: 724). As we shall see, even in the face of severe criticism, Evtushenko maintained his autobiography's fidelity to the Soviet ideological project.

Additional details of the translation process, involving a series of exchanges among Evtushenko, European journalists, and American publishers, have hitherto been sparse, prompting much speculation (see Johnson 1963).[13] Thankfully, two archival

[11] Note that Flegon dropped the word 'precocious' (*prezhdevremennaia*) from the title –– it was released by Flegon Press simply as *An Autobiography* [*Avtobiografiia*]. On Flegon, see Jacobson 2020: 240–53.

[12] See 'Zapiska KGB pri SM SSSR o nastroeniiakh E.A. Evtushenko'.

[13] Priscilla Johnson's analysis of what she terms 'L'affaire Yevtushenko' –– the publication of *A Precocious Autobiography* –– is the most detailed of any that

documents shed some light on the history of this autobiography's publication. The first of these documents is a transcription of a speech that Evtushenko gave to the Plenum of the Governing Body of the Union of Writers of the USSR. This speech was delivered in March 1963 (the Plenum convened from 26 to 30 March), after the poet had returned from his travels in Europe.[14] Portions of this speech (perhaps 10% at that), particularly those in which Evtushenko admitted his own fault, were selectively quoted in *Literaturnaia gazeta* on 30 March in a highly tendentious piece.[15] In fact, this entire *Literaturnaia gazeta* issue was full of critical responses to Evtushenko's autobiography authored by leading Soviet literary functionaries, including Oleksandr Korniychuk and Georgii Markov.

Evtushenko's speech before the Plenum is a fascinating rhetorical performance in its own right as well as a significant documentary source that can help us to understand factual details concerning this publishing scandal. In his own telling, Evtushenko claims that the Soviet publisher Mezhdunarodnaia kniga had finalized a contract with an American publisher (unnamed) for a one-volume collection of the poet's writings. The contract called for some autobiographical prose, though there were few specifications on this point. Evtushenko finally began writing these prose reflections during his European travels in January–February 1963. Instead of merely submitting a dossier or resume in the style of a traditional Soviet institutional autobiography, Evtushenko harnessed this opportunity to disabuse Western journalists of distortions in his life's story and in his ideological

I have encountered. The American translator and journalist as early as the summer of 1963 introduced the possibility that Evtushenko 'was the victim of a giant provocation'; namely, that some Party authorities had given Evtushenko (perhaps only tacit) permission to publish his text abroad, only to turn on him a few weeks later after the installments in *L'Express*.

[14] See 'Vystuplenie na plenume pravleniia Soiuza pisatelei SSSR 1963, mart' in Yevtushenko 1963a. There are two different transcriptions; the first in Folder 10 is complete, while the second one in Folder 11 is fragmentary. I quote from the Folder 10 transcript. However, the Folder 11 transcript is valuable because, unlike the Folder 10 transcript, it identifies the critic who delivered a rebuttal to Evtushenko's speech: the Ukrainian writer and functionary Oleksandr Korniychuk ('A. Korneichuk' in the document).

[15] 'Za vysokuiu ideinost' i khudozhestvennoe masterstvo sovetskoi literatury: plenum pravleniia Soiuza pisatelei SSSR' 1963: 1–2.

convictions by writing more than one hundred pages (Yevtushenko 1963a: 1–3). The avalanche of hurtful German, French, and Russian-language émigré press that Evtushenko received during his tour deeply frustrated him, and he resolved to send his expanded autobiography not just to the American publisher, but also to European outlets. This is the poet's 'defensive' motivation, a need to protect and fashion his global literary reputation on his own terms in the face of an international campaign of misinformation.

> However, during the trip, I had to confront a series of articles about myself published in the foreign press. Moreover, in some of the articles, facts from my biography were misinterpreted, and besides that, I was presented as some sort of rebel against communism. Unfortunately, in support of this myth, numerous labels were promoted, which were previously pinned onto me by several Soviet critics in their articles. For instance: 'album verse', 'the ideological leader of the spiritual beatniks [*dukhovnykh stiliag*]', 'bard of the dirty bedsheets', 'pseudo-revolutionary', etc. [...] So, as you see, it sometimes happens that our critics give adequate material to our enemies.[16] (Yevtushenko 1963a: 2)

Notice how Evtushenko frames his decision to write and publish this autobiography as a vindication of the communist cause. Connecting this quotation to my article's introduction, the *apologia pro vita sua* logic of the literary celebrity autobiography comes to the fore here. Further, Evtushenko even pins the origins of Western misinformation (perhaps even willful disinformation) onto domestic hardline critics, claiming that Western journalists are merely repeating what they read in the Soviet press. This is a bold move that testifies to Evtushenko's confidence in walking the figurative tightrope in front of his writer peers and ideological bosses. Continuing on, he insists that he was never told that he needed to clear these writings with Soviet authorities before sending them to the American publisher, though in his speech, the poet recognizes that this assumption

[16] All translations from the original Russian are my own unless otherwise specified.

and subsequent omission was 'shameful' and flippant.

The rest of the speech seeks to fend off denouncers – most prominently, the writer and literary bureaucrat Aleksandr Chakovskii, who edited the influential periodicals *Inostrannaia literatura* and *Literaturnaia gazeta*. Chakovskii called Evtushenko a 'cynical three-handed Shiva': 'Yesterday, Chakovskii on this platform depicted me as a cynical three-handed Shiva' (Yevtushenko 1963a: 3). This is a derogatory comparison with the Hindu god of destruction, though Shiva is typically shown with four arms and thus four hands. These nefarious three hands supposedly allowed Evtushenko to fight against Stalin's cult of personality, write lewd verse, and also flirt with anti-Soviet poetic content. This, coincidentally, is not the only deity to whom Evtushenko will be compared during this scandal, as we shall see below.

More substantively, Chakovskii charged that the prose autobiography represented a marked ideological departure from the poet's verse. Evtushenko in response places excerpts of his poetry and prose side-by-side in his speech to prove that his ideological fidelity to the communist cause is evident in each mode of writing (Yevtushenko 1963a: 4). The transcript records that the poet had to fend off numerous interruptions from the audience, so as to finish his speech in its entirety (this was successfully accomplished). He concludes by comparing his original Russian manuscript submitted to the French magazine *L'Express* with embellished portions from the French translation that were supposedly fabricated by the editors:

> When I was given the French translation of the Autobiography the day before yesterday […], I was struck by an entire series of wanton abbreviations and distortions […], as well as additions. I shall present the Russian text to the Writers' Union, so that the opportunity for misunderstanding may be eliminated. (Yevtushenko 1963a: 9)

Of course, the sensationalist titles and captions conjured up by the French editors also did Evtushenko no favours. He presented the Russian original to the Writers' Union as proof of the Western editors' manipulation.

This was a high-pressure *apology* for Evtushenko, in both senses of the word –– a simultaneous *apologia* of his actions as well as

a partial admission of wrongdoing. He offered a textually grounded defence of his autobiography while recognizing that it was self-congratulatory at some moments. Further, he apologized for his naive trust in the 'bourgeois' journalists' integrity; he carelessly expected that they would give an honest rendering of his text to French readers. Evtushenko recognizes his mistake (note, *not* a crime) and ultimately chalks up any wrongdoing to naivety. It is obvious from his speech that the young writer raised in the bosom of late-Stalin and post-Stalin Soviet literary culture and institutions had expertly assimilated the rules of the game. That is, he knew where and how to soften the edges of his provocative actions, divert blame to other actors (e.g. Mezhdunarodnaia kniga, reactionary Soviet critics, Western editors, the émigré press), affirm his communist commitments, and articulate a rhetoric and logic comprehensible and even acceptable to the cultural-ideological authorities. At one point in the speech, he even pulls off a bit of humor: 'I.I. Anisimov accused me of answering "I don't know" to the question "Are you the Christ?" Well, how, ultimately, was I supposed to answer the question? (laughter)'.[17] (*Ibid.*: 8) There is a touch of foreshadowing here. Mere months later, the Italian film director Pier Paolo Pasolini invited Evtushenko to play the role of Christ in his 1964 film, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (*Il Vangelo secondo Matteo*), an opportunity that Evtushenko had to decline because of his (temporarily) more restricted position in Soviet literature post-March 1963 (Evtushenko 1998: 348–50).

In addition to Evtushenko's speech itself, the archival document also includes a brief reply offered by the Ukrainian literary functionary, politician, and Stalin Prize winner Oleksandr Korniychuk. Korniychuk's reply reveals that there is still considerable doubt as to whether Evtushenko had actually learned his lesson in dealing with the treacherous 'bourgeois' press: 'You don't understand this. You took it and threw it up, and of course, they used it… Even now you say the same thing… I don't understand, what's the matter? You're obliged to defend your Motherland and the Party's honour' (Yevtushenko 1963a: 11). This is the last transcribed word

[17] Beginning from 1952, Ivan Ivanovich Anisimov (1899–1966) served as the Director for the Institute of World Literature.

of this brief public criticism. Notably, Korniychuk does not express an explicit threat of lengthy sanction or expulsion.

The second relevant archival document is a letter sent from the translator and literary journalist Olga Carlisle to René Guyonnet, editor-in-chief of *L'Express,* dated 24 July 1963 (Carlisle 1963). Carlisle was set to review the English translation of Evtushenko's autobiography for the *New York Herald Tribune* (see Carlisle 1963a: 1, 11).[18] In preparation for this review, she asked Guyonnet for information regarding the original Russian manuscript. Guyonnet reveals that it was entrusted to the *L'Express* journalist K.S. Karol. Karol seems to have served as Evtushenko's primary contact in the Paris publishing world. Karol also translated Evtushenko's autobiography into French for the book publication (cited above). Guyonnet assures Carlisle that Evtushenko was more than satisfied with the French translation first published in *L'Express* and then in book form by Éditions Julliard, a surprising revelation and one that contradicts his remarks to the Writers' Union. Note that Evtushenko did not know French. Someone initially relayed enough information about the French translation to give Evtushenko a sense of its character. Eventually, a complete 'back translation' (from Russian to French, then from French back to Russian) was made. Evtushenko's archived speech to members of the Writers' Union quotes liberally from the French version in Russian translation, with some excerpts running longer than a paragraph. Evtushenko in his speech claims that he received the *L'Express* version (back translated into Russian) only a few days prior to his speech. He would later complain to the editorial board of *Iunost'* that the domestic vitriol that he suffered was partially explained by distortions inherent in the 'translation of a translation'; he urged his colleagues to consult the Russian original held by the Moscow Branch of the Party Committee.[19]

[18] In her largely positive review ('A Young Soviet Rebel's Manifesto for Truth'), Carlisle notes that MacAndrew's English-language translation differs from the French version published serially in *L'Express*. Despite certain faults of the poet and the translator, Carlisle still regards the autobiography as a 'manifesto of a whole new Soviet generation.'

[19] 'The featured text, the "translation of a translation," is a product that has very little correspondence to the original, as will be made evident to you.' –– from 'Otvet E.A. Evtushenko na pis'mo

The most intriguing portion of this letter from Guyonnet to Carlisle deserves full quotation: 'I can, however, confirm to you that Evtushenko was more satisfied with the text's publication than the press had said. A letter that he wrote later to Karol attests to this. For reasons that you can guess, it is however impossible to reference this letter'.[20] The implication here is that publicizing Evtushenko's letter of praise to Karol would put the Soviet poet in a compromising position, given that he was forced to publicly abjure the decision to publish his autobiography without passing it through the censors. Evtushenko also objected to the portions of text supposedly fabricated by *L'Express*. Guyonnet's letter, in sum, contradicts central elements of Evtushenko's Writers' Union speech.

Was Evtushenko more truthful in his private correspondence with Karol, or in his public speech to his fellow Soviet writers? A probable hypothesis runs as follows: Evtushenko was riding high on three years of international travel and success at home and abroad (from 1960 through early 1963). He sought to craft a favorable account of his life to disseminate in multiple languages and countries throughout the West. He gathered that his position at home was secure enough to pursue this tamizdat venture of self-celebrification. The 'liberals' in January 1963 looked to be in the ascendancy and many leading writers even up until March 1963 thought that the trends of liberalization would only accelerate.[21] Moreover, the actual contents of the autobiography, even if they were 'juiced up' by Western editors, were thought (by Evtushenko at least) to be within the bounds of Thaw-era de-Stalinization discourse. It is possible that Evtushenko approached a high-ranking party

redaktsii zhurnala "Iunost'" (Afiani et al. 2005: 626–28).

[20] My thanks to Melvin Thomas for his help with this translation. See the previously cited Carlisle 1963.

[21] Olga Carlisle remembers a conversation with Kornei Chukovskii, Andrei Voznesenskii, and other Russian intellectuals in spring, 1962: 'My older friends like Chukovsky and the painters and writers of my own age all believed that things were beginning to open up, that release from censorship and intimidations was imminent. [...] Voznesensky kept assuring me that this was indeed happening, that freedom was coming to Russia' (Carlisle 1985: 73). The November 1962 publication of Solzhenitsyn's *Odin den' Ivana Denisovicha* [*One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*] in *Novyi mir* was, already by the mid-1960s, considered to be the 'warmest moment' of the Soviet Thaw (Hayward and Crowley 1964: 89, 192, 206).

member (e.g. Aleksei Adzhubei, Khrushchev's son-in-law, and the editor of the newspaper *Izvestiia* –– he and Evtushenko became acquainted with one another during the poet's lengthy travels to Cuba in 1961–62) to probe the possibility of publishing his autobiography abroad. *Life Magazine* contributors even suggest that the Soviet ambassador to France, Sergei Vinogradov, signed off on the *L'Express* publication. Of course, in the absence of archival documentation, this is pure speculation. After the scandal had receded into the past, Evtushenko in private maintained that his autobiography 'benefited greatly our Motherland and Leninism…' (Afiani et al. 2005: 685–89). Even unauthorized revisions made by French editors were acceptable to Evtushenko, so long as western European readers could access the poet's first-person testament.

In January 1963, the risk of serious retaliation from the Soviet ideological authorities must have looked manageable to the poet, especially when compared to the upsides of multilingual, international publicity. This would have been especially true if Evtushenko had received prior permission from someone within the cultural-ideological apparatus. Evtushenko's bold attempt to revise the rules for Soviet writers vis-à-vis publishing abroad failed, in a sense. Tamizdat in Western, non-communist outlets without pre-authorization was and would remain verboten within Soviet literature. Evtushenko's *A Precocious Autobiography* as well as Andrei Voznesenskii's neo-modernist poetry and Ernst Neizvestnyi's non-representational art, were some of the most prominent offending artefacts castigated by Khrushchev in March 1963. The Thaw in the fateful spring of 1963 took a cold turn. Still, all three artists survived the affair, with Evtushenko and Voznesenskii continuing to publish in the coming months and years. The censorious press campaign turned out to be temporary. This was partial, temporary cancellation and not total oblivion. Even some American observers, such as CBS correspondent Marvin Kalb, were mildly surprised at how quickly Evtushenko resurfaced in Soviet print (Kalb 1963: 20–21). A year after the scandal, Evtushenko even felt comfortable enough to recommend and distribute his samizdat autobiography within Soviet artistic circles, claiming (hyperbolically) that its publication was 'the greatest communist propagan-

distic act' (Afiani et al. 2005: 750–52).
Thanks to this episode, Evtushenko's fame only grew. He attracted the sympathy of Western observers dismayed by Khrushchev's crackdown, including the discerning academic specialists Gleb Struve and Max Hayward. Struve is admittedly moderate in his estimation of Evtushenko:

> In 1962 I was inclined to regard Yevtushenko as a man who was becoming more and more a tool –– and a useful tool at that –– of the regime. I have since modified my view of Yevtushenko in the light of his *Autobiography* (though it is in many ways, in my opinion, an unpleasant document), and especially in view of the circumstances of its publication [...]. (Hayward and Crowley 1964: 139)

Context here outweighs the text itself in Struve's evaluation. Evtushenko's decision to seek publication in a Western periodical, which precipitated the public campaign against the poet, placed Evtushenko in a sympathetic light. Hayward sounds even more uniformly positive notes:

> Fortunately his [Evtushenko's] recently published autobiography shows him in a more unpretentious and engaging light than he appears to many on the public platform. Those who are well acquainted with his work will be struck by his humility and his acute awareness of his own limitations. (Hayward and Crowley 1964: 207)

I now turn to the text itself as well as the variegated American reception of said text. Finally, with this tamizdat book, a reader could hold Evtushenko, the poet, 'in the hollow of his hand,' whether he read German, English, French, Hebrew, Italian, etc. But exactly what image of the poet did this reader encounter? And how did Evtushenko justify his decision to pen an autobiography at the tender age of thirty?

A Precocious Autobiography: A Reading of Evtushenko's Rhetoric

The E.P. Dutton version of Evtushenko's autobiography includes approximately a hundred pages of text supplemented by glossy

photographs in the centre of the book, rushed out for expedited release in the summer of 1963. The photographs depict Evtushenko declaiming his poetry to a smiling German audience in Munich during his February 1963 visit, admiring a Max Ernst canvas, and preparing his autobiography for publication (with a pack of Marlboro Reds strewn across the handwritten pages). The publisher and translator acted quickly –– that is, in just a few months –– to release this slim book to Anglophone markets. This was obviously perceived as a favourable commercial opportunity that would reward a rapid response. The 1963 E.P. Dutton edition features streamlined simplicity: it lacks a contextualizing introduction, a foreword, or endnotes. It is possible that E.P. Dutton was the unnamed American publisher referenced in Evtushenko's Writers' Union speech, the publisher that had contracted with Mezhdunarodnaia kniga. E.P. Dutton had already released *Yevtushenko: Selected Poems* (translated by Robin Milner-Gulland and Peter Levi) in 1962 and then the autobiography a year later. More controversially, Dutton published Vladimir Dudintsev's *Not by Bread Alone* [*Ne khlebom edinym*, 1957, translated by Edith Bone]; clearly, contemporary Soviet literature located at the outer bounds of ideological acceptability was of interest to this particular US publishing house (see Shcherbinina 2023: 303–04).

While Evtushenko argues multiple points in this text, his principal message is as follows: he wants the West to understand that he is representative of Soviet society's yearnings and not an oddball, a radical, or an exception. Rhetorically, Evtushenko finds it useful to cast his 'autobiographical sketch' as a corrective to Western journalistic distortions of his life and mission. This helps to explain why such a young writer (barely thirty years of age), who at least in the West had only been known for a few years, should be granted an entire book to outline his biography. Evtushenko offers himself as the poetic orator for his generation, his people, even for the entire world: 'For me the world contains only two nations: the nation of good people and the nation of bad people. I am a nationalist of the nation of good people' (Yevtushenko 1963: 22). This is a shrewd humanistic revision of the Cold War binary, one that uplifts the good and condemns the bad on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Because Evtushenko tells us that he has been anointed the poet-

protagonist in the battle of good over evil, he simply *must* compose his autobiography in order to dispel artificial misunderstandings. The circumstances require him to release his autobiography precociously early.

An earlier Russian variant of the autobiography's title was *The Autobiography of a Person Who Matured Too Soon* [*Avtobiografiia rano sozrevshego cheloveka*]: articles from the Soviet press campaign adduce this title in their plural condemnations.[22] This 'autobiography of a person who matured too soon' more accurately describes the audacious decision of the young poet to publish his autobiography. What would become the canonical title in Russian, *Prezhdevremennaia avtobiografiia*, is of course more laconic and also features a pun –– Evtushenko revises the fixed phrase 'premature death' [prezhdevremennaia smert'], reframing it instead to denote a 'premature' recollection of life. This linguistic play gestures toward one of Evtushenko's (and Soviet literature's) idols: Vladimir Maiakovskii. Maiakovskii began working on his own prose autobiography, 'I Myself' ['Ia sam'], in 1922, on the threshold of thirty (Maiakovskii 1955: 7–29). He augmented and published his autobiography in 1928; it is a fragmentary, humorous, factually imprecise, and ironic recollection that verges on the genre of pseudo-autobiography.[23] The English translation 'A Precocious Autobiography' is a felicitous choice, because it alludes to the author-subject's youth as well as his (purported) literary and experiential maturity.

In the body text itself, the poet curates and relays a reading biography that is maximally ecumenical and international. He claims that his father raised him on a diet of European literature beginning at an early age. The trickle of names and literary influences mentioned in Western reportage and in the verse lines of Evtushenko's poetry itself transforms in the autobiography into a flood of writers from Russia and the West: 'Dumas, Flaubert, Schiller, Balzac, Dante, Maupassant, Tolstoy, Boccaccio, Shakespeare, Gaidar, Jack London, Cervantes, and Wells' (Yevtushenko 1963: 20). Later, in Evtushenko's late adolescence, he learned to love Hemingway, Whitman, Frost, and T.S. Eliot –– all towering figures in the mid-

[22] For instance, this title was referenced in Zhukov 1963: 3.

[23] See Lyons 2014: 678–89 for a discussion of the 'celebrity pseudo-autobiography' in twenty-first-century American literature.

century American literary canon (Yevtushenko 1963: 64–65).[24] These lists presented in prose synergize with the public image of Evtushenko's reading habits constructed in the surveyed reportage as well as in much of his poetry. Here is a poet steeped in the Russian literary tradition but open, and proud of his openness, to major writers from European and American literatures. The accompanying photographs affirm that he is at ease socializing with West German movie stars and that he appreciates abstract art. His outlook is clearly an internationalist one, though his biography is literally and figuratively rooted in the Russian soil. The autobiography's curated tales of geological expeditions, wartime experiences, urban brawls against bullies, and poignant scenes from village weddings in Siberia concretize Evtushenko's 'authentic' connection to the Russian people.

Evtushenko does not shy away from adopting the communist label, even when addressing a primarily anti-communist or at least non-communist Western audience. To be clear, the poet *was* a communist, though his understanding of what 'communism' meant was famously flexible.[25] Evtushenko asks his Western readers to appreciate the fact that the Russian people are committed to a humane form of communism, a revolutionary spirit that is compatible with an enthusiasm for the best of modern Western art and thought. He insists that Russians are essentially a revolutionary people and that the majority of them, as 'sincere communists,' are not murderous dogmatists or even dispassionate dialectical materialists (Yevtushenko 1963: 39–43). Communism in Evtushenko's definition finds its principal expression not in a statement of political economy or philosophical anthropology, but rather in individuals' ardent self-sacrifice. This sentimental 'communism as self-sacrifice' formulation lacks philosophical precision as well as any historical contextualization; but as dis-

[24] From an official Soviet perspective, Eliot ('the apostle of American decadence and modernism') is the outlier in this list; his 'aesthetic aristocratism' was extremely problematic for mainstream Soviet literary criticism (see Zasurskii 1966: 169–74). The first Soviet-published book of Eliot in Russian translation only appeared in 1971 (see Eliot 1971).

[25] Nina Bialosinskaia in her diary quotes a 1959 conversation between Evtushenko and another writer about the essence of communism. Evtushenko muses: '"And what exactly is communism? It's a quality of the soul. Communism is talent"' (Bialosinskaia 2018).

cussed below, it was apparently both plausible and attractive enough to convince major American political figures (e.g. Sargent Shriver) and seasoned journalists of Evtushenko's respectability. In reviewing the autobiography for *The New York Times*, Orville Prescott did not judge Evtushenko's communism to be a conspicuous shortcoming; instead, it is an understandable quirk explained by 'the chance of his nationality' (Prescott 1963: 31). The poet's 'Soviet patriot[ism]' escapes Prescott's critique. The book is 'a sharply outlined self-portrait and a moving plea for human dignity, kindness, generosity and freedom of expression' (Prescott 1963: 31).

Evtushenko's actions throughout the narrative are cast in a maximally rhetorical and supposedly self-sacrificial manner. His was a slaloming path between assertions of self-importance and humility. He stresses his duties and responsibilities, yet neglects to describe the benefits of his position, such as regular international travel, meetings with foreign writers and celebrities, and material privileges conferred to elite members of the Writers' Union. The pose articulated in such expressions as 'I despised money', and, 'money always was and still is the means of making people into slaves', exposes the author to the charge of hypocrisy (Yevtushenko 1963: 37). Evtushenko, it ought to be remembered, profited handsomely as a self-giving servant of the people and enjoyed numerous trips abroad to the United States, Europe, and Cuba in the early 1960s. The frank recognition of his material privilege would have weakened the poet's rhetorical appeal to Western audiences. While scholars today might find Evtushenko's omissions, exaggerations, and moral binaries unconvincing, many contemporary readers and reviewers were persuaded by the poet's rhetorical pose (e.g. to cite Hayward again, Evtushenko's autobiography shines an 'unpretentious and engaging light' on the poet –– Hayward and Crowley 1964: 207).

The way that Evtushenko weaved discussion of literary activities and texts into this ego-document also bears comment. All of the poems mentioned in the autobiography existed in translation (not only in English translation) and constituted Evtushenko's most famous literary works. The 'big three' underlined in the autobiography are 'Prologue', 'Babi Yar', and 'The Heirs of Stalin.' Evtushenko's multi-page yarn about the anx-

ious publication of 'Babi Yar' in *Literaturnaia gazeta* predictably places the poet on the moral-literary vanguard in the struggle against both antisemitism and neo-Stalinism (Yevtushenko 1963: 116–22). Evtushenko did not use *A Precocious Autobiography* as an opportunity to introduce non-Soviet readers to the 'deep cuts' in his poetic corpus. Instead, the autobiography was a victory lap celebrating the poet's own courageous and popular verse that already enjoyed recognition in multiple national literary systems.

The final pages universalize Evtushenko's belonging to 'the people'. He not only channels the hopes of the Soviet Thaw, but he also claims connection to everyone. As a poet, he dwells here, there, and everywhere: 'What I wanted was that the whole world should be my home' (Yevtushenko 1963: 113). At some point in the early 1960s, Evtushenko supposedly discovered that he had a responsibility to the entire world (Yevtushenko 1963: 115). What stronger claim to public relevance is there than this, the ability and even *obligation* to direct one's poetic talents in service of others? The poet's pose of global belonging was itself manifested in the *Autobiography's* lightning-quick publication and circulation among various languages and national literatures. I understand this autobiography to be both evidencing and contributing to the ongoing construction of Evtushenko's celebrity in part because the text uplifts its author as a figure of global importance –– but also because its message, confessional tone, publication circumstances, and Soviet and American responses directed attention toward Evtushenko's personal and professional trajectories.

Evtushenko's *Autobiography* in America: Institutional Adoption

'If a narrow circle of the Western intelligentsia read *Doctor Zhivago*, then evidently broader readerships will read Evtushenko's Autobiography.' –– Il'ia Ehrenburg (quoted in Ogryzko 2014: 4).

MacAndrew's translation of Evtushenko's *Autobiography* resonated with a US mass readership as well as the country's political elites. In addition to the text itself, the months-long Soviet press campaign against Evtushenko (approximately from March through May 1963) sustained American journalists' interest in the poet for the better

part of the year. Put differently, in terms of media interest, the epitext often outcompeted the text. To offer one high-profile example, *Life* summarizes the contents of the autobiography along with excerpts from the worst condemnations of the poet in the Soviet press (Scherman 1963: 32–37). The *Life* journalists speculate that the press campaign may be a 'prelude to a purge.' The photographs that *Life* runs along with the textual profile were mostly sourced from the *Autobiography* (plus an additional photo –– Evtushenko declaiming in a standing-room-only Paris theater –– 'Cry Out, Russian Poet!' the caption shouts); they certainly do not depict a cowed or humbled writer. *Life* neglects to mention that the audience in one of Evtushenko's largest readings on his Paris tour consisted of local French Komsomol members (i.e., communists).[26]

This Luce publication was attempting to corral American readers' support and sympathy for the persecuted writer, playing on the familiar topos of the defiant Russian poet-martyr. (It was Pasternak who was made to play this role in American coverage of *Doctor Zhivago* and the subsequent Nobel Prize scandal in 1958). The new Evtushenko-specific element to this existing cultural code was the movie-star popularity commanded by the poet. *Life* editors made sure to portray the packed theatre of thousands in the photo spread. Further, the *Life* profile and the *Autobiography* itself both include a photograph of Evtushenko seated in between the International 'film stars Maria and Maximilian Schell' (Yevtushenko 1963: 48–49). Evtushenko's ability to exhilarate a crowd, even a Western crowd, with his poetry recitation was an exotic reality for American mediators, especially given the comparatively minor position of poetry and poets in American public life.

The supposed 'trial' (mentioned in the *Life* caption in Scherman 1963) that Evtushenko endured at the Writers' Union Plenum paled in comparison to actual Soviet trials against writers, such as those endured by Joseph Brodsky (1964) as well as Andrei Siniavskii and Iulii Daniel' (1966). But for American observers, the 'vilifications' that the poet suffered were evidence enough of his budding martyr status (Scherman 1963: 37). Evtushenko's life story and courage in the face of state persecution

[26] Evtushenko cites a poetry recital in the Maison de la Mutualité in his speech to the Writers' Union (Yevtushenko 1963a: 3).

were thought to be so inspiring that the first director of the newly launched Peace Corps, Sargent Shriver (brother-in-law of then President John F. Kennedy, husband to Eunice Kennedy), even decided to read aloud excerpts from Evtushenko's autobiography to the Corps' members. Shriver eventually included the work on an official Peace Corps reading list (see a mention of this in Bellow 1963 and also 'Peace Corps Told to Read Soviet Poet' 1963: 14).[27] Shriver did not share Evtushenko's communist commitments, yet found the poet's message and fervour inspiring nonetheless. Shriver is quoted in *The New York Times* instructing the Peace Corps members: '"You should go overseas", he said, "believing as much in the ideal of the American Revolution –– that all men are created equal –– as Yevtushenko believes in his Communist ideas"'. Evtushenko's idealism was thought to be (productively) infectious. Evidently, the supposed ideological oppositions between the US and the USSR were no obstacle to American admiration of this Soviet communist poet.

The reporting on this speech indicates that Shriver stressed the *revolutionary* inheritance of American political values, a styling of American political history that appealed to contemporary Soviet writers, such as Evtushenko and Viktor Nekrasov, both of whom visited the US in the early 1960s and had positive things to say about some of America's Founding Fathers qua revolutionaries.[28] The US embrace of Evtushenko was most intense among members of the capacious and powerful left-of-centre establishment. Many conservative voices found Evtushenko odious ('Yevtushenko: Prostitute Poet', read one article title published in the conservative magazine *Human Events*) and were especially distraught at the ostensible infiltration of Soviet communist ideology into the American foreign policy apparatus through Shriver's reading recommendations (Ryskind

[27] From the latter: 'To 170 members in their last week of training at Teachers College, the Peace Corps director read passages from the Russian poet's newly published book "A Precocious Autobiography"'.

[28] Official Thaw-era Soviet culture found much to admire in the American political tradition. Viktor Nekrasov, for instance, casts Americans as a revolutionary people. In writing about Thomas Jefferson, Nekrasov underlines Jefferson's enlightenment bona fides, his radical progressivism, and his support for the French Revolution (Nekrasov 1967: esp. 119–21).

1963: 2).[29] An exception among conservatives is the poet, thinker, and essayist Peter Viereck, who criticized modern American conservatism (the ideological synthesis known as 'fusionism', spearheaded by William F. Buckley Jr.'s *National Review*) for its perceived 'extremist' tendencies. Following along with liberal-establishment voices, Viereck in a longform essay in *TriQuarterly* approvingly cites Evtushenko as an 'anti-Stalinist rebel' (Viereck 1965: 8).

Shriver did not just mention Evtushenko once, in passing. Shriver's speeches to various groups (e.g. the National Federation of Catholic College Students, the San Diego State College Convention, and the National Student Association) throughout August and September of 1963 featured Evtushenko front and centre. In trying to connect to the youth of America, Shriver favoured showcasing Evtushenko as his opener. From all accounts, Shriver was a charismatic and effective orator –– the speeches discussed below took place in the context of Shriver's 'recruiting tours' to drum up more applications for his rapidly expanding Peace Corps, founded just two years prior in 1961 (Liston 1964: 168–69). In California in the autumn of 1963, Shriver in fact gave twelve speeches in just four days (Stossel 2004: 293–96). Evtushenko and his autobiography played important roles in Shriver's rhetorical gambit.

We encounter truly surprising ideological reflection on display in Shriver's speech to the San Diego State College Convention (Shriver 1963). Shriver quotes Evtushenko at length from the poet's autobiography, with multiple passages praising the spiritual resources of communism and contrasting it with the empty materialism (*not* understood in a philosophical-metaphysical sense, but as a synonym for 'commercialism') characteristic of the West. *A Precocious Autobiography* appears in Shriver's reading as an opening salvo in the 'revolution' or 'purification' of Soviet communism, whereby the Soviet youth will revivify the communist ideals with 'spiritual content with the power to draw humanity to its cause' (Shriver

[29] Ralph De Toledano's review of *A Precocious Autobiography* slings sharp arrows at Evtushenko, citing the 'newspaper poet's' ethical, literary, and political failures (see De Toledano 1963: 404–06). Ever more venomous critical profiles of Evtushenko appeared in the conservative flagship magazine *National Review*, as well as *Human Events*, in the subsequent years (see Geltman 1972: 637–39; 'Yevtushenko: Prostitute Poet' 1968: 11; 'The Iron Curtain on Stage' 1973: 9).

1963). This is both 'a threat and a hope' (Shriver 1964).[30]

For his San Diego speech, Shriver boldly titled the address 'The Challenge of a Communist Poet', emphasizing Evtushenko's ideological otherness from the American mainstream, but not demonizing him for his communist position. I say *boldly* titled, as Shriver, in the early years of the formation of the Peace Corps, had to contend with powerful critics (Richard Nixon and President Dwight D. Eisenhower among them) who regarded the Corps as an impractical outfit full of communist-sympathizing beatniks.[31] Though the Peace Corps was on firmer political and financial footing in 1963, Shriver's decision to uplift Evtushenko all while accepting and even foregrounding the label of him as a 'communist poet' left him open to critique from the anti-communist right.[32]

As this brief summary of these speeches suggests, Shriver is not articulating a by-the-numbers doctrine of co-existence, much less advocating a proto-'peace through strength' foreign policy position. He observes and even admires the youthful revolutionary spirit percolating in Soviet Russia; his duty is to call attention to the 'Challenge of a Communist Poet' in an attempt to galvanize American college students to build 'a world of liberty under law, […] an open society for all men. Are we committed to making that vision a reality?' (Shriver 1963).[33] Here, Evtushenko serves as an estimable competitor to young Americans; his revolutionary zeal

[30] In this later Bellarmine speech, Shriver expresses hope for co-existence between the converging youths of the US and the USSR.

[31] Evtushenko as 'the Beat Keats' –– according to *Time* magazine circa 1961 –– had faded from American public perception; in its place stood Evtushenko as the critic of antisemitism and neo-Stalinism. Evtushenko's ideological image was remarkably malleable both synchronically (in the hands of differently positioned American actors at a particular time) and diachronically (in the political establishment's projection of Evtushenko throughout the 1960s).

[32] Shriver's confidence and burgeoning clout in Washington DC power politics is on full display in the previously cited 20 August 1963 *New York Times* piece. '"Someone may object to my sending out something written by a Communist", he [Shriver] said'. Shriver evidently thought that any objections could be easily brushed aside as he went ahead in warmly recommending the *Autobiography*.

[33] This left-liberal 'open society' was theorized by Karl Popper in his influential work of political philosophy *The Open Society and its Enemies* (1945). As the name suggests, *Open Society Foundations*, the George Soros-founded network, took inspiration from Popper's book.

ought to be matched, if not surpassed, by Shriver's audience. As was discussed earlier, Evtushenko in publishing *A Precocious Autobiography* did not intend to make a radical statement that would reset the pre-political, 'spiritual' foundations of Soviet communism. But at this moment, in front of this audience, and in the hands of this particular speaker, Evtushenko's autobiography was made to serve in the role as a respectable foil, an idealistic and humanistic revolutionary committed to the radical purification of his society. Even if the poet's original message and intentions were shifted in Shriver's reception, this is the sort of high-profile engagement –– substantive, influential, admiring –– that Evtushenko was seeking with the translation and publication of his autobiography.

Other American commentators were even more enterprising in appropriating Evtushenko's autobiography for their own ideological purposes. Consider the former CIA director Allen W. Dulles' contextualizing introduction to a portion of Evtushenko's autobiography, published in the *Saturday Evening Post* (Yevtushenko 1963b: 45–69). Almost the entire 10 August 1963 issue was devoted to Evtushenko (an abridged reprint of his autobiography). The magazine's cover captions implicitly compare Khrushchev to Stalin and note the contraband status of the work in Soviet Russia –– 'Banned in Russia: A Soviet poet's brilliant story of his life and fight for freedom under Stalin and Khrushchev'.

Dulles (who served as the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency from 1953 through 1961) was not a spymaster who stuck to the shadows. Even during his tenure at the CIA, he had a 'glamorous' public profile in the US and abroad (Grose 2006: 499). He left his post as director after the Bay of Pigs debacle, though he exited his office with public support from President John F. Kennedy and Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, both Democrats. (Behind the scenes, the relations between the Kennedy brothers and Dulles were much more fractious).[34] Many Republicans in Washington also supported him –– Dulles voted for Richard Nixon in the 1960 presidential election and served under the Republican President Dwight D. Eisenhower (Grose 2006: 530). His retirement by no means represented a retreat from the public eye. On the con-

[34] For a relentlessly critical, revisionist account of Dulles' career, see Talbot 2015.

trary, Dulles in 1963 published a book (*The Craft of Intelligence*), gave dozens of lectures, and he was even 'a pioneer in the emerging television fixture of the talk show' (Grose 2006: 539). This is all to say that he was a genuine 'power player' in American public life in 1963, even after his official retirement from the CIA (Talbot 2015: 487). His introduction to Evtushenko's *Autobiography* must be understood as a key intervention in the history of the text's American reception.

In contradistinction to Shriver, Dulles strategically downplays Evtushenko's stated commitment to a revived Leninist communism. Dulles' profile instead champions Evtushenko as a courageous fighter in the anti-communist struggle. According to the headline's subtitle, Evtushenko wrote 'the most sweeping indictment of Soviet Communism that any Soviet author has ever written. The Kremlin banned this book. Now, for the first time, American readers can find out why'. The crowds of adoring fans that come to listen to Evtushenko are described as fomenting a 'revolt' against the existing order. It must be restated that Evtushenko considered his activities and publications vis-à-vis his autobiography to be supportive of the Soviet regime. In other words, this is sensationalist, ideologically driven journalistic framing at its most brazen.

An archived draft of Dulles' *Saturday Evening Post* remarks draws a provocative connection between Khrushchev's Secret Speech (delivered at the 20th Party Congress in February 1956) and Evtushenko's *Autobiography* (see Dulles 1963). Dulles takes credit for circulating Khrushchev's speech globally during his tenure as CIA director. Given the speech's anti-Stalin content, it was made into a potent weapon for the CIA in the worldwide battle for hearts and minds. Dulles then invokes Evtushenko's *Autobiography*, which can also serve the CIA's ideological aims, provided the proper *context* (that all-important term appears yet again) is appended to it. The contrast between Dulles' and Shriver's creative interpretations of Evtushenko's ideological intervention could not be starker. Whereas Shriver finds in Evtushenko a worthy competitor, devout communist, and fellow idealist, Dulles in the *Saturday Evening Post* casts Evtushenko as an anti-communist fifth column.

Further down in Dulles' published preface, a more nuanced argument emerges. Dulles is convinced that Soviet com-

munism suffers from a fatal contradiction: while even its anti-Stalinist intellectuals may still respect communism 'in theory,' communism 'in practice' will devolve into repression against artists, and thus prompt the intellectual class to stage a bloodless revolution. Dulles expanded an existing line of thinking in the American intelligence community: figures in both the FBI and the CIA were convinced that portions of official Soviet culture –– the 'liberal', Westernizing, anti-Stalinist elements –– could be re-directed as potent weapons in the cultural Cold War.[35] After meeting Evtushenko at a public reading, one CIA source in the summer of 1962 described Evtushenko as a champion 'of liberalism, non-conformism, and extravagancy', someone who, moreover, was aware of his burgeoning American popularity, and wanted to strengthen ties with audiences and publishers there ('Aerodynamic Vol. 23 (Operations)' 1962: 12–13).[36] In effect, the CIA hoped to drive a wedge between Evtushenko and Khrushchev specifically.[37] Dulles' implicit policy prescription may be explicated as follows: Evtushenko ought to be encouraged in his writing, embedded ever deeper into the (American-led) Western system that prides free artistic expression, and given the space, and perhaps also explicit encouragement, to recognize the theory-praxis contradiction at the heart of Soviet communism.

Even though Evtushenko and his cohort never came close to staging a dramatic coup d'état in the 1960s, there is a way to read late twentieth-century history as ultimately vindicating Dulles' intellectual-centred policy vision. Some writers born and developed in the Soviet system sought

[35] On the FBI's translation, dissemination, and overall weaponization of Evtushenko's 'Babi Yar' poem in the fall of 1961, see Silverman 2020. The sensationalist headline –– 'Inside the FBI's File on Soviet Poet-Dissident Yevgeny Yevtushenko' –– inaccurately applies the term 'dissident' to Evtushenko, an editorial framing often encountered in early American coverage of the poet back in the late 1950s and early 1960s. A more scholarly analysis of the FBI's appropriation of 'Babi Yar' will be forthcoming in my doctoral dissertation.

[36] My thanks to Yuri Leving for sharing this source.

[37] In the 8 April 1963, edition of the CIA's *Bi-Weekly Propaganda Guidance* ('Further Restrictions on Soviet Literature and Art' 1963: 644), Evtushenko's 'autobiographical articles' published in *L'Express* are thought to denounce '"Stalinist" attitudes, such as conformism and antisemitism, which are actually shared by many Soviet officials today, including Khrushchev.' This guidance was used to direct journalists in reporting upon current affairs in a manner harmonious with CIA objectives.

refuge on the western side of the Iron Curtain (e.g. Brodsky, Solzhenitsyn, Aksenov, Dovlatov, Voinovich, etc.) throughout the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. Any widespread hope among Soviet intellectuals for reform from within was on the wane by the mid-1960s and totally battered by 1968, after the Warsaw Pact's invasion of Czechoslovakia in August. Greater disillusionment went hand-in-hand with internal and external emigration. The more or less one-way direction of travel of dissenting or non-Soviet writers from east to west may not have been the immediate political outcome that Dulles hoped for, yet it certainly enriched the cultural life and ideological authority of European, American, and Israeli literary scenes.

Conclusion

Two decades later, the popular Soviet poets and writers of the 1960s (the *shestidesiatniki*) were on the vanguard of Russia's emerging civil society and more variegated political life during perestroika. Evtushenko himself was a founding member of the society Memorial (dedicated to the research and rehabilitation of victims of Soviet repressions) as well as an elected member of parliament representing Kharkiv in the Supreme Soviet in 1989. But, in retrospect, the *shestidesiatniki* were not as politically revolutionary as their nineteenth-century namesake. Nevertheless, some of their number defected from the Soviet system to the West, while others tried to critique this system's repressive excesses from within. Dulles was right to stress the political potential of this generation of writers, a generation that would seek out alternatives to a neo-Stalinist, xenophobic politics, even if a 'bloodless revolution' with intellectuals at the vanguard never materialized during Dulles' lifetime.

To summarize my main interventions, I have excavated the convoluted publication circumstances of Evtushenko's *Autobiography*, analyzed the poet's own rhetorical posture as constructed in the text and its epitextual space, and then tracked two important American (political) engagements with the *Autobiography*, those of Sargent Shriver and Allen Dulles. The publication of the *Autobiography* in French, German, English, etc. throughout 1963 represented a highwater mark of Evtushenko's celebrity in the West and especially the United States. The poet and his autobiography were well received in multiple

quadrants of the cultural field, from daily newspapers to journals of opinion to literary reviews to scholarly periodicals and even in the halls of US government agencies.

A great deal of Western attention was directed to the context (how and where it was published) and epitext (critical reactions, interviews, and speeches concerning it), even more so than the actual contents of the autobiography. Especially by the time the E.P. Dutton volume was released in the summer of 1963, Western literary tastemakers, political actors, and scholars dilated upon the vituperative Soviet campaign against Evtushenko, thereby enlivening the narrative and authenticating Evtushenko's ostensible 'stubborn independence' from Soviet ideological directive (Prescott 1963: 31). In the eyes of American observers, Evtushenko in the early 1960s was most useful as a weathervane for Soviet cultural politics. While some of his poetic and prose work merited comment, it was more often his changing fortunes within Soviet society –– themselves metonymic of larger cultural trends –– that attracted the attention of American mediators.

A Precocious Autobiography represents an outlier in the history of Soviet Russian tamizdat: an supposedly pro-communist and even pro-Soviet work (at least, according to its author) that was directly handed over to 'bourgeois' Western publishers by a celebrated official writer; an autobiography praised by mainstream figures in the West but condemned by the Soviet Communist Party and swathes of Soviet society.[38] These radically different receptions, combined with the author's own rhetorically calculated, sometimes obscure actions, offer plural historical narratives worthy of elucidation. *A Precocious Autobiography* deserves greater attention from literary historians, especially those interested in the European reception of Soviet literature. My own reception-studies angle was US-focused, but as the first part of the article suggests, there is much more to uncover concerning the initial French and German publications, not to mention the *Autobiography's* influence on the literary-political debates in other national literary systems.

[38] Framed in this way, Evtushenko's autobiography creates a striking contrast with the prototypical Gulag-focused tamizdat publications discussed throughout Klots 2023.

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